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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000976

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: PRO-REGIME NEO-NAZIS INTIMIDATE INDEPENDENT MEDIA,  
OPPOSITION

REF: 99 MINSK 535

MINSK 00000976 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Following March's stolen presidential elections, the pro-government, pan-Russian, neo-Nazi group "Russian National Unity" (RNE) appears to have undertaken a campaign of intimidation against Belarus' independent media and opposition political parties. This campaign apparently includes threatening letters and planting a fake explosive at an opposition party headquarters. Independent journalists and opposition activists have long suspected cooperation between the RNE and GOB security services. Although cooperation has not been directly proven, the GOB appears both to permit and benefit from RNE's ongoing threats against critics of the regime. End summary.

#### Targeting Opposition Media

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12. (C) On August 14, the independent newspaper "Vitebsky Kuryer" received a letter containing threats from the leaders of the Vitebsk chapter of Russian National Unity (RNE). The letter decries the Vitebsky Kuryer as "financed by American and German enemies of Russia" and demands the paper to stop publishing articles aimed at breaking "the unity of Slavic nations." The letter also condemned the Vitebsky Kuryer for "discrediting" the Belarusian government and President Lukashenko who are "fighting an all-out battle for the greatness of the Slavic peoples against liberals of various hues who seek to enslave the great Russian people." The letter threatened to use its GOB contacts to shut down the Vitebsky Kuryer, and ended with the salutation "Glory to Russia!"

13. (C) On August 23, Charge met with Vitebsky Kuryer Editor-in-Chief Vladimir Bazan in Vitebsk to discuss the RNE threat. Bazan showed Charge the RNE letter to confirm its reported content. In the upper left corner of the letter was a blatantly anti-Semitic cartoon and the phrase, "We are cleansing Russia." Bazan was visibly shaken and expressed to Charge fear that RNE could use its GOB contacts to close the Vitebsky Kuryer. Bazan recalled that the authorities had evicted the paper from its previous office. (Note: The Vitebsky Kuryer now shares office space with a taxi dispatch company. End note.) When asked, Bazan could not prove direct GOB-RNE linkage, but noted that the GOB, in forcing the paper to move has, has carried out the RNE's threats.

14. (C) On August 22, Poloff discussed the RNE threat to Vitebsk Kuryer with Mikhail Pastukhov of the independent

media-advocacy organization Belarusian Association of Journalists. Pastukhov observed that the RNE supports the government and has been allowed to operate despite the apparent threats to independent newspapers. He also referred to RNE graffiti incidents over recent months in Baranovich and several other cities outside Minsk against members of the independent media. Pastukhov noted many independent journalists suspect that the GOB directs RNE actions. When Poloff asked Pastukhov whether he believes there is a connection between the government and the RNE, he replied that such a connection is difficult to prove but noted that the group supports the Lukashenko government and operates with impunity.

#### Targeting Opposition Parties

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¶5. (C) The RNE threats against the Vitebsky Kuryer and other independent media parallel RNE efforts to intimidate opposition parties. On April 14, the chapters of opposition parties Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) and Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) in the eastern region of Mogilev sent a complaint to the regional BKGB administration about RNE vandalism and other activities directed against opposition organizations. The BPC and BPF noted that the RNE is an unregistered organization and thus operates illegally but received no answer from the BKGB. (Note: At the time of the BPC-BPF complaint, the GOB was criminally prosecuting leaders of pro-democracy NGOs, including "Partnership" and "Malady Front." End note.)

¶6. (C) On April 16, 15 RNE skinheads disrupted a sanctioned demonstration in People's Friendship Park in support of imprisoned opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin by smashing stands, burning BSDP leaflets, stomping on BSDP streamers, breaking a portrait of Kozulin, and shouting "Lukashenko is our president!" The vandals also

MINSK 00000976 002.2 OF 002

yelled anti-Semitic and racial epithets. A few minutes before the RNE attack, police reportedly left the vicinity.

¶7. (C) On July 20, Vitebsk opposition United Civic Party leader Yelena Zaleskaya reported her party had received a threatening letter from RNE. The letter described Zaleskaya as an implacable enemy of "Great Russia" and demanded that she end her opposition to the Lukashenko regime lest she face RNE "actions."

¶8. (C) On August 17, a fake explosive device was found attached to a door of the offices of BPF party. Pictures published by the state newspaper "Sovetskaya Belarus" show that the device was a dark green container adorned with a neo-Nazi emblem and filled with RNE leaflets. According to BPF leader Vinstuk Vyachorka, RNE symbols earlier had been painted on the BPF office's doors.

¶9. (C) On August 18, an RNE spokesman denied any connection between RNE and the bomb hoax. However, on August 21, BPF Deputy Head Aleksei Yanukevich told Poloff that at least twice in the past year the BPF had received letters from RNE, which BPF had never opened. Yanukevich also noted that the RNE had threatened the BPF chapter in Grodno four to five years earlier. When Poloff asked Yanukevich whether the RNE targeted his party because of a specific BPF action or political platform, he replied that the dummy bomb was just another RNE act of intimidation against groups opposed to the Lukashenko regime and repeatedly characterized the RNE as a surrogate for the BKGB and other GOB security services.

#### An RNE-GOB Connection?

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¶10. (C) RNE has long been accused of having ties to the BKGB and other security services. In February 1999, RNE activists

assaulted opposition website Charter 97 founder Andrey Sannikov. While Sannikov did not directly blame the GOB for the assault, he did accuse the regime of creating conditions in Belarus that attracted Russian skinheads and asserted the Belarusian police and other security services had wide contacts and cooperated with the RNE (reftel).

¶11. (C) While direct evidence to substantiate an RNE-GOB connection remains to be found, the RNE's unwavering support for the Lukashenko regime, despite the apparent involvement of GOB security services in assassinating the leader of the RNE in 2000, suggests such a connection. (Note: On February 4, 2004, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly issued a report that detailed, among other suspicious murders and disappearances in Belarus, the GOB's November 2000 arrest of Colonel Dmitriy Pavlichenko, founder of the GOB special operations unit SOBR, for his alleged ordering of the assassination of then-RNE leader G.V. Samailov. One day later, authorities released Pavlichenko without charge or explanation.)

¶12. (U) In May and August, a group of civil society activists, including historians and former political prisoners, sent a petition to the GOB Prosecutor General and BKGB headquarters to condemn neo-Nazi vandalism of the Kurapaty massacre site near Minsk, a memorial to the Belarusian writer Vladimir Korotevich in Vitebsk, and a mosque in Slonim and to call upon the BKGB to address the apparent revival of neo-Nazism in Belarus. As of September 1, neither the Prosecutor General nor the BKGB has answered the petition.

Comment

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¶13. (C) Despite Yanukevich's certainty regarding who ultimately is responsible for the threats against the Vitebsky Kuryer and the BPF, the direct connection between the RNE and the BKGB remains nebulous; the GOB will maintain a consistent level of distance and deniability in any case. However, it is clear that the Lukashenko regime benefits from RNE's campaign of intimidation against independent media and the opposition parties.

Moore